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America Summoned to a Holy War



A Sermon
Delivered in the Church of the Epiphany
Washington, D. C.



Palm Sunday evening, April 1, 1917
on the eve of the Assembling of Congress



By the Rector
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By transfer
The White House.

America Summoned to a Holy War

A SERMON

"And I rose up and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them; remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses."

—Nehemiah IV, 14.

THE function of the ancient Jewish prophet was by no means limited to moral and religious instruction. Both the national and international interests of his people claimed his attention and were made the subject of his counsel. He did not hesitate to criticize the public policy of the government. He would sometimes denounce a proposed alliance with some other nation. On the other hand, he would advocate an alliance which he deemed wise and safe. Scanning the horizon from his prophetic watch-tower, he would warn the king and people of approaching danger to the nation, and when a foreign enemy threatened invasion of the land, he would lift up his voice in the name of the Lord God as a divine messenger to rouse the people to prepare for war and to resist oppression. The two great principles which informed and inspired his prophetic utterances were liberty and justice—political liberty and social justice. Moses on the mountain top, lifting up his hands in prayer to the Lord of Hosts, while Joshua and the Hebrew warriors fought with Amalek in the plain below, presents a picture typical of the function of the Israelitish prophet.

Our text gives us a striking example of the place which the Prophet held among the people of God. Nehemiah, engaged with his people in rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, having received intelligence of the approach of hostile bands designing to attack them, addresses himself to the nobles and rulers and the rest of the people, as follows: "Be not ye afraid

of them; remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses."

The circumstances under which we meet today, my brethren, are not dissimilar to those which confronted the Jewish leader and his people on this occasion. A powerful and unscrupulous foe beyond the seas is levying war upon the United States, sinking our ships, murdering our citizens without mercy, forbidding our merchantmen the freedom of the seas, secretly plotting an alliance with Mexico and Japan against our national integrity.

What now is the duty of the Christian minister to his people and to the public in this crisis? The answer in my opinion cannot be doubtful. He should say to them as Nehemiah said, "Be not ye afraid of them; remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses." Yes, I hold that he who speaks for God should not be dumb at such a moment, that he should not avoid discussing the national crisis as if it lay outside his vocation as a minister of Christ. Equally do I repudiate the counsel of the pacifists who falsely invoke the Christian religion on behalf of the policy of non-resistance, who maintain indeed that war is never justifiable and that no Christian man can consistently take any part in war, even in repelling the invasion of his country. No, there is no basis in the Bible for cowardly submission to tyranny or invasion. On the contrary, the Bible everywhere exhorts us to stand for righteousness and justice and liberty, and to resist tyranny and wrong. Listen to the words of another of the ancient prophets: "He that dasheth in pieces has come up before thy face; keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily." Nahum II, 1.

The ancient worthies whose examples are set before us in Holy Writ, the heroes and martyrs of the Christian Church, have ever displayed a firm resolve to resist the invader and the oppressor, and to stand bravely for human rights and for national safety.

— These pacifists have as little of the spirit of manly religion as they have of true patriotism. They would have taken the sword from the hands of Judas Maccabeus when he drew it in defence of his country against the unspeakable tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes! They would have snatched the pen from Thomas Jefferson and John Hancock and George Washington when they came forward to sign the Declaration of Independence! They would have sent the embattled farmers home from Concord and Bunker Hill! They would have preached submission at Valley Forge!

Let me say then, as plainly and as strongly as I can, speaking as a minister of Christ, speaking as a messenger of God, speaking with a solemn sense of the obligations of my sacred office, speaking in the sanctuary of Christ, and with a full sense of my accountability for every word I utter in this holy place,—that it is the high and sacred duty of the American people to take up the gage of battle which Germany has thrown down to us and to prosecute the war against her with all our energy and with every resource at our command—not hesitatingly, not half-heartedly, but with all our hearts and with every pound of energy at our command, realizing the vest interests at stake, the tremendous consequences for weal or woe dependent upon its issue.

The Christ who smote with the sword of his mouth the hypocrites who oppressed the widows and orphans in his day would not rebuke the United States for drawing the sword in defence of innocent, helpless women and girls from the outrages of a brutal soldiery. The Christ who before Pontius Pilate declared that if His kingdom were of this world His soldiers would fight, would not condemn the United States which is a government of this world for sending forth her armies to defend the cause of justice and humanity. The Christ who used physical violence to cleanse the temple will not rebuke the United States for using the violence of war to cleanse the earth of the foul domination of this ruthless nation which stops at no outrage in its vast attempt to establish dominion over the whole earth. The Christ who is the King of Righteousness

will not condemn this Republic for taking her place in the ranks of the peoples who are so nobly battling for right and justice in the earth. The Christ who is "first King of Righteousness and then King of Peace" will surely approve of our resolve to recognize no peace which is not founded on justice and equity.

There are several considerations of great moment to which I desire to invite your attention. I beg of you in the first place to realize the colossal proportions and the ultimate aim of this tremendous war. It is not merely an European War—it is not merely a strife against England and France and Russia and Italy. It is the culmination of a long prepared effort to establish a Pan-German Empire, with no less an object than the Prussianization of the world. With all the formidable tenacity and methodical thoroughness which characterize the Prussian people, this gigantic plot has been steadily pushed for more than twenty years past. The plan is clearly mapped out in a book by Otto Tannenberg, called "The Greater Germany, the Work of the Twentieth Century", which appeared at Leipsic in the year 1911. In this book we have an exact program of the seizures to be effected in Europe and Turkey with the purpose of establishing an empire extending from Hamburg through Constantinople and Bagdad to the Persian Gulf.

This stupendous project to which the German leaders long ago committed themselves, plans to make Germany master of Austria, of the Balkans, of Turkey in Europe, of Turkey in Asia, and to extend its power to the very Persian Gulf itself. But even this is not the full extent of the boundless ambition of the Emperor and his satellites. Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Western Asia and the greater part of Arabia would pass under the absolute protectorate of the German Empire.

Tannenberg further advocates territorial acquisitions in Africa, in Oceania and in America, as the perfectly logical consequence of the accomplishment of the Hamburg to the Persian Gulf project. In America his plan embraced the seizure of Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and Chili. These are his words:

"German South America will provide for us in the temperate zone a colonial region where our immigrants will be able to settle as farmers. Chili and Argentina will preserve their language and their autonomy, but we shall require that in the schools German shall be taught as a second language. Southern Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay are countries of German culture; German will there be the National tongue." (See "The Pan-German Plot Unmasked," p. 105, by André Chéradame.)

This book of Tannenberg's is only one of a group, which reveal the boundless ambition of the Emperor and his counsellors. It makes it very plain that this immense war, the most tremendous that the world has ever known, concerns us in the United States in a very real and direct fashion.

But it is not only the vast schemes of Pan-Germanism that bring the United States into relation with this immense war. It is not only that the conquest of Europe and of Asia Minor would be preliminary to conquests in the Western Hemisphere which Germany has in view, but it is the great principles which are really involved in this conflict that chiefly concern us. It might be said, Why should not the German Empire become so vast as to realize this dream of Pan-Germanism? might it not be better for the world to be under the government of such a power as Germany? might not her immense efficiency in every sphere of life and activity be a great advantage to the nations brought under her sway? But, my friends, as you well know, there is another aspect to this question. The nations engaged in this great conflict represent certain principles of immense importance,—fundamental principles mutually antagonistic, great ideals of a totally opposite character. It is not merely a struggle for territory, for power, for economic and commercial advantage, for the markets of the world, for the nerves of commerce and business. No, beyond all this, it is a conflict *between irresponsible autocracy on the one hand and ordered liberty on the other*. Germany stands for the autocrat, for the suppression of individuality, for the repression of liberty, for the re-

fusal of really representative government. England and France, and now Russia herself, stand for the great principles of democracy, of liberty and justice and representative government, for freedom of speech and of the press, for freedom of conscience, for the real freedom of the seas. These are the chief principles at stake. This is the real significance of this vast and tremendous conflict. This is, above all, the reason why the great Republic of America and every patriotic citizen within her vast borders, is vitally interested in the issue of this war. This is why, even if we were not challenged to war by Germany as we are today, it would be at once our highest interest and our most sacred duty to take our part, with all the force that we can exert, with all the resources at our command, on the side of these liberty-loving peoples who have drawn the sword in the defence of human rights, yes, of humanity itself.

I tell you, my friends, our liberties are involved in the issue of this struggle; our freedom as a nation, our existence as a democratic representative government. If Germany triumphs, woe to American independence, woe to American ideals, woe to American peace and happiness!

But I take higher ground. I call upon America to recognize the S. O. S. call of our brothers in France and England and Russia and Italy, to save them from the peril of Prussianism, to take our stand at their side in the defence of liberty and civilization and humanity, not for anything that we can gain, not even to protect anything that we might lose, but for the love of those great principles which we have received as a heritage from our fathers, and which it is our solemn and sacred duty to defend, if need be, with the last drop of our blood. For I beg you to realize that the responsibility of this awful war rests upon the military leaders of Prussia. The attempts to make England or France or Russia responsible for it have absolutely failed. The pretexts upon which these attempts were built up, have been torn to tatters, not a shred of fact remains at this day. It has passed into history beyond the possibility of revision, that the

Prussian power has been preparing for this war for many years, that it has been precipitated in the fulfilment of a vast and ambitious scheme which has no parallel in history. It is now seen that for more than twenty years Germany has been spinning her webs in all neutral countries. She had set on foot a world-wide propaganda which is without precedent in its immensity. The whole ambitious scheme presents a phenomenon without a parallel in the records of time. She chose the means and the moment for precipitating a war upon Europe, and so well were her schemes laid that they almost succeeded. It is also now an indisputable fact that England, France, and Russia have been dragged into this war against their will, and they are fighting not for territorial aggrandizement but for liberty and international justice.

Furthermore, I beg you to remember that those heroic soldiers of France and England and Russia are really *fighting our battles*. They are shedding their blood for the great principles upon which our Republic rests. They are fighting with such magnificent self-sacrifice for democracy and liberty and international justice. Those blood-soaked trenches across the whole breadth of Europe, are the breakwater that is keeping back the flood of tyranny that would otherwise sweep away the foundations upon which the fabric of our independence and of our rights and liberties, rests. Yes, the Armies of the Allies are really safeguarding the future of this great Republic. This is not a rash statement or an ill-considered opinion. It is the firm conviction of many of our best thinkers, who clearly understand that the victory of Germany would unquestionably mean serious peril to the independence of the United States. Listen to these words of ex-President Eliot of Harvard University: "The quickest, the best, the surest means for Americans to defend themselves against a German invasion is to conclude with France and England a permanent alliance, offensive and defensive, having for its aim the maintenance of the freedom of the seas for the Allies and resistance to any maritime attack. It is time for all Americans to take sides openly with the European

peoples that for so many long months have been standing up against the military despotism of Prussia."

It would be easy to quote the utterances of prominent Germans, to the same effect; for instance, this: "Some months after we have done our business in Europe, we shall take New York and probably Washington"; and this: "We shall extract one or two billions of dollars from New York and other points." (Admiral von Goetzen.)

I offer a third consideration which should have a powerful influence in deciding our duty at this critical moment. Let me say to you, my friends, that if the Congress of the United States, which assembles to-morrow, shall recognize the fact that Germany has long been committing acts of war against this country, and is in fact at war with us at this hour, sinking our ships and murdering our citizens and plotting against the integrity of our national domain, and shall therefore declare war against Germany in self-defence, it will not only be a justifiable war, a war which we have not provoked, a war which we have not desired and do not desire, a war having in it no ulterior purpose of aggression or aggrandizement,—solely and purely a war to vindicate our national honor and to protect the rights and liberties of our people—but beyond and above all this, it will be in the highest sense of the word a Holy war, a war to save all that is best and holiest in civilization, a war to save mankind from the dominance of an evil and malign power which has shown itself during more than two years of conflict, to be destitute not only of all sense of honor and truth and loyalty to its plighted faith, but destitute also of humanity and mercy and of all regard for the principles of morality recognized among civilized nations.

I am glad to make my own the editorial utterance of one of our great dailies: "We favor therefore a flat-footed declaration of war upon Germany, rather than a semi-evasive recognition that a state of war exists. Germany should be arraigned before the world for high crimes and misdemeanors and war denounced against her for the purpose of punishing her past offences and restraining her in the future."

I cannot undertake a recapitulation of the infamous crimes that the Government of Germany has committed against mankind—the violation of treaties, the burning and looting of cities, the poisoning of wells, the wholesale murder of inoffensive civilians, both men and women, the atrocious Zeppelin raids upon undefended cities, the atrocious and heartless cruelties connected with her submarine warfare, the sinking of hospital ships, the robbery and spoliation of inoffensive citizens, the deportation of thousands of women and girls into atrocious slavery, her connivance at the immense Armenian massacres. To all this she has now added the immeasurable atrocities which have accompanied the evacuation of territory in Northern France. She has been guilty of a vandalism that has scarcely a parallel in all history, and the devastations that her soldiers have committed under orders of her officers, have to a large extent had no relation to military necessity or military advantage. They have fulfilled the description which the Prophet gave of old of the invasion of a ruthless army: “The land was as the Garden of Eden before them and behind them a desolate wilderness.” (Joel.) The human savagery exhibited by the German Armies in this retreat reveals the blackness of the German soul. All their frightfulness in Belgium and Servia was a minor thing compared to the unspeakable frightfulness of their devastation, literally their destruction, of the fair fields of France, in their recent retreat. No wonder an editor in our secular press has exclaimed, “Our duty to God and man is to aid in the chastisement of the war monster. Let us join in punishing the guilty and securing such compensation as can be wrested from Germany for her victims.”

I have no hesitation then in saying that the voice of a just God summons us to this War and that it is in the highest sense of the word a Holy War. The people of the Middle Ages flocked to the standard of the Cross for what seemed to them a holy purpose—the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre from the defiling touch of the unbeliever. But, my friends, those Crusades shrink into insignificance compared with the crusade to which we

are summoned at the present moment. It is not to rescue a sepulchre from the hands of the Mohammedans to which we are called, but to rescue brave and noble peoples from the unspeakable cruelty and brutality of a powerful confederation of nations marshalled under the Prussian Eagle—nay, to rescue the civilized world itself from the talons of a monster more merciless than the eagle towards his prey. The cruelty, the rapacity, the savagery of Prussianism is not a matter of opinion, or the indictment of prejudice, but a hideous fact which we have seen with our own eyes during the last two years or more. No words can tell its abomination. Indeed, the principle is avowed in so many words by eminent representatives of the German Empire—thus Maximilian Harden has declared: “Every means will be enthusiastically employed against her enemies by the German people. We will go back to the times of savagery when man was a wolf for his fellow-man.” (Quoted by *Le Temps*, Feb. 9, 1916.)

Will America halt and hesitate in the presence of such an issue as this? Will she listen to the siren song of the pacifists who have flocked to Washington in such numbers at this present moment, with the purpose of weakening the resolve of our legislators to vindicate the honor of the United States,—nay, to defend our rights and liberties against insolent aggression and outrageous invasion? Will she not have discernment to perceive that this pacifist movement is inspired partly by disloyalty to the Republic and organized by the spies and plotters who are paid to do the bidding of Germany in our midst? I do not deny that some of these preachers of “peace at any price”, some of these advocates of national dishonor, are well meaning enthusiasts, misguided theorists, whose judgment has gone astray and whose brains are so bewildered that they can no longer recognize the path of national duty and national honor, though it stretches out plainly before them—but I tell you, my friends, the great body of these pacifists are the secret agents of Prussianism, and that procession of pacifists which was to march the streets of Washington tomorrow, should have been marshalled under the flag of Prussia.

They are flooding the press with advertisements appealing to the women of the country to save their sons, their husbands and their sweethearts from the carnage of the battlefield,—seeking to blind them to the real issue, which is brave resistance to tyranny, or cowardly submission to foreign dictation—courageous battle side by side with the conquering legions of the Allies against the forces of tyranny and barbarism, or craven submission *now* at the cost of a far more terrible conflict with little hope of success in the years to come!

I, for my part, do not believe that the spirit of patriotism and liberty is dead in this land of our love. No, the American people will demand of their legislators that they take up the gage of battle which has been insolently thrown down to us by this arrogant power that seeks to dominate the earth, and that we will hasten to place ourselves by the side of those gallant peoples who have now for more than two years been fighting our battles in Europe and Asia,—resolved that all the immense resources of our great Republic shall be employed to turn the scale of this world war, so that complete victory shall crown the efforts of the Allies, and Prussian militarism shall be crushed, and the German people, as well as the other peoples of Europe, delivered from the yoke of the Hohenzollern dynasty.

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